1609/1509. X

A

SERMON

Preach'd in the Cathedral

Church of St. Patrick, Dublin;

Before his Excellency

JOHN, Lord *Carteret*,

Lord Lieutenant General,

AND

General Governour of *Ireland*.

On *February* the 10th. 1724.

BEING

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

By *ROBERT HOWARD*, D.D. Chaplain to His Excellency.

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Sermon preached in the Cathedral Church of St. Patrick, Dublin, &c.

St. Mark viii. 34.

And when he had called the People unto him, with his Disciples also, he said unto them, whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow me.

Nothing can be plainer, if we look into the World, than that Men are naturally inclined to please and indulge themselves; so nothing can be more evident, if we look into the Scriptures, than that Men are commanded to deny themselves. And from this great Opposition between the Tendencies of Nature, and the Precepts of Religion, much Difficulty hath arisen in the Conduct of Life, and the Will of God hath been rejected as wholly destructive

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And when he had called the People unto him, with his Diſciples alſo, he ſaid unto them, whoſoever will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his Croſs and follow me.

AS nothing can be plainer, if we look into the World, than that Men are naturally inclined to pleaſe and indulge themſelves; ſo nothing can be more evident, if we look into the Scriptures, than that Men are commanded to deny themſelves: And from this great Oppoſition between the Tendencies of Nature, and the Precepts of Religion, much Difficulty hath ariſen in the Conduct of Life, and the Will of God hath been repreſented as wholly

deſtructive of the firſt Laws he ſeems to have wove in our Original Conſtitution.

So unskillfully hath this Queſtion commonly been managed between Nature and Grace, that on each ſide Men have run into unwarrantable Extremes, either by purſuing the Dictates of Nature into too great an Indulgence of Appetite and Inclination, or by an illjudged Severity laying unneceſſary Reſtraints on moderate and innocent Deſires; on the one ſide making Appetite almoſt the Meaſure of Religion, on the other making Religion ſcarce reconcilable to Reaſon.

The firſt of theſe in truth, is the moſt dangerous Extreme, for the Bulk of Mankind would reconcile Religion with Indulgence and Exceſs, making *the Yoke of Chriſt* very *eaſy, and his Burthen* extremely *light*; and ſo have turned the Truth of God, and of Chriſtian Religion into a pleaſing, ſoft, and looſe Morality, too much accommodated to the Cravings and Tendencies of Nature.

Whilſt others have ſowered Religion to an exceſſive Degree, and ſeem to have *called down Fire from Heaven* to conſume themſelves, by unnatural Severities and ſtrange Mortifications; as if Religion were not perfective, but deſtructive of humane Nature, and we could not pleaſe the Supreme Being better than by tormenting ourſelves.

Whereas the Chriſtian Religion is the moſt conſiſtent Scheme, conſiſtent with the Law of Nature upon

upon which it is founded, and which it was designed to compleat; nor is there any thing in the Doctrine of Self-Denial or Mortification, so universally injoyned by our Blessed Saviour to all his Followers *in the Text*, that is not consistent with, and perfective of humane Nature.

I shall therefore lay down and explain the Doctrine of a Rational Self-Denial, and shew,

First, on what Principles in Reason and Nature it it is founded.

And *Secondly*, How it hath been improved and advanced to the utmost Degree of Perfection by the Christian Religion.

And *First*, I am to shew, on what Principles in Reason and Nature, Self-Denial is founded.

Every thing in Nature, of whatever kind it be, naturally tends to its own proper Perfection, and is either directed by its own Choice, or some Original Tendency towards the Attainment of its Good or End, in which it acquiesces, and by which it is compleated: and therefore in simple and perfect Natures, every thing moves on regularly, and attains the End for which it was designed. In all such Natures, there being no Opposition or different Tendencies, there cannot possibly be what we call Self-Denial; for where nothing is irregular, nothing can go wrong, or consequently need be restrained; every Faculty by the most perfect and unerring Direction producing it's proper Effect: So that in the divine Nature

ture there can be no ſuch thing as Self-Denial, for all his Faculties or Attributes being equally perfect, and guided by the moſt unerring Wiſdom, muſt eternally produce their proper End, without the leaſt Difficulty or Variation; it may in this ſenſe therefore moſt truly be ſaid of God, that he cannot deny himſelf, there being no Repugnancy or Oppoſition in his Faculties, no Occaſion for Reſtraint, all his Attributes being conſtantly as it were employed in the Purſuit and Attainment of infinite Perfection.

But in Natures leſs perfect, mixed, and compounded and unequal in their Compoſition, different Powers and Faculties will have different Tendencies and Inclinations, and theſe may often produce ſuch Effects, as may not be for the Good and Perfection of the Whole, ſo that ſome of them muſt govern and regulate the Reſt, leſt all ſhould ſuffer by the wild Conduct of contrary and inconſiſtent Principles.

Now as Pleaſure and Complacence are neceſſarily annexed, in every thinking or ſenſible Being, to every Tendency and Inclination of any Power or Faculty in that Being, ſo wherever ſuch Faculty is reſtrained in the Exerciſe of its proper Power, there neceſſarily ariſes Reluctance and Uneaſineſs, this being perfectly unavoidable in the Nature of things: And ſince it is impoſſible that all ſhould be gratified, being contrary and inconſiſtent, our next Inquiry muſt be to ſee where the Reſtraint ſhould lie, and for this we muſt look into and apply this general Doctrine to the Nature of Man.

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Nothing is more evident than that Man is a very mixed and compounded Being, with the greateſt Variety of Appetites, Tendencies, and Inclinations; all would be gratified, but that is impoſſible, ſome therefore muſt be reſtrained, and that is uneaſy: So that Difficulty and Conflict of ſome kind or other, is the Condition of his preſent Being, and as neceſſary to his Nature, as that he is leſs perfect than God.

It certainly therefore is the Duty and Intereſt of ſuch a Being, to conſult the Main of his Happineſs, and conſider what will give him the compleateſt and moſt laſting pleaſure, and by which he may incur the leaſt Uneaſineſs and feweſt Diſappointments, and ſteadily purſue thoſe Methods which will moſt contribute to attain the End and Perfection of his Nature.

A Man that ſo conſiders will certainly perceive that Reaſon and Virtue muſt be the Guide of his Actions, and that all his inferiour Appetites and Paſſions when indulged too far are Fatal and Ruinous in their Conſequence: That they are planted in him by God for a certain End, and only uſeful in a certain Degree; and that tho' they may, even in their Exceſs, promiſe ſome Pleaſure and Complacence, yet they are to be limited and reſtrained, becauſe a greater Inconvenience will follow, and more Uneaſineſs will ariſe, than if they had not been indulged at all. Self-Denial therefore naturally and neceſſarily ariſes from a rational and comprehenſive View of a Man's preſent Nature and Condition, his Tendencies and

Appetites, compared with his true Felicity and proper End: and a rational Self-Denial consists in rightly proportioning his several Powers and Abilities for the Attainment of Happiness by the Means of Virtue and Religion, so as neither thro' present Passion or Appetite to forfeit the Main of his Felicity, or weakly and superstitiously to lay himself under unnecessary Restraints which are neither required by the Laws of Reason or Religion.

Self-Denial therefore is a Virtue placed between two Extremes, of Criminal Indulgence that is ruinous in the Consequence, and unnecessary Restraints that are of no Consequence at all; between a vicious Excess destructive of all Virtue, and an outragious Disappointing of natural and innocent Desires, that would be destructive of all Pleasure; between inslaving Reason to Sense and Appetite, and making it a cruel Tyrant over Nature.

The general Doctrine of a rational Self-Denial being thus laid down, and established on the clearest Principles of Reason and Nature; I shall now particularly explain and apply it in all the several Cases that arise in the Conduct of Life, by which it will appear of what Importance it is towards the compleating of humane Nature.

As there is neither Power or Faculty, Appetite or Tendency in the Body or the Mind, that is not capable of Variety, and several Degrees in the Exercise and Application, so as to promote the true End of

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our Being, or be inconſiſtent with, and deſtructive of it, there is therefore nothing in our Nature, that may not be the Subject Matter of Self-Denial, or a rational Reſtraint.

And this I ſhall not take in the greateſt Latitude, becauſe that would comprehend the whole Doctrine of Vice and Virtue, every Virtue being the denying of ſome Appetite or Paſſion; but I ſhall reſtrain it to a Degree that ſeems to be within the Limits of Virtue, or wherein every Indulgence would not be ſtrictly a Vice; and yet where Self-Denial or a rational Reſtraint, does very much contribute to perfect our Nature.

And this I ſhall ſhew in Reference to our Bodies, our Paſſions, and our Mind.

Our Bodies being made ſubject to a continual Decay, are therefore to be ſupported by as conſtant a ſupply, which ſupply is to be proportioned to the Neceſſities of Nature; which if it much exceeds, it becomes a Burthen, and inſtead of ſupporting, deſtroys; and this is plainly and certainly criminal, and deſtructive of the very Ends of Nature: But I am at preſent inquiring of ſomething that ſeems to be within the Bounds of Temperance, becauſe we are apt to imagine that there is a great Latitude in this Virtue, and ſuch Allowance to be made for Conſtitution and Cuſtom, that one ſcarce knows how to ſettle the true Limits of Temperance.

I believe therefore that Reaſon and Experience may teach us, to deny our ſelves in many Inſtances where we might perhaps indulge, without incurring the Cenſure of downright Intemperance, and our Bodies and our Minds would find the Advantage of ſuch a Reſtraint: Every one muſt perceive that his Body is more active, light and eaſy, more fitted for all the Purpoſes of Life, when ſome proper Reſtraint hath been laid upon his Appetite, and Nature hath not been indulged with Variety and Fulneſs: and the Mind rejoyces to find herſelf ſet free from the heavy Chains that all Exceſs lays upon her, becomes chearful and ſprightly, and purſues with Vigour her Duty and true Intereſt, when not diſtracted or miſled with the falſe and diſtorted Images that ariſe from the Fumes of Indigeſtion.

And ſuch an habitual Denial of our Appetite, begets by Degrees an eaſy Habit, and draws after it a numerous train of Advantages, of conſtant vigorous Health, a chearful ſprightlineſs, great command of our Time and Buſineſs, the Application of our Expence to nobler Purpoſes, and an eaſy ſlow-declining old Age; whilſt that Indulgence, which the World too often accounts innocent, hath almoſt as many Inconveniences as the moſt vicious Exceſs.

But does not Reaſon and Religion carry us ſtill farther, and adviſe us ſometimes to refrain from our uſual Refreſhments; this is a moſt excellent and uſeful Self-Denial, and comes to be conſidered under the

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peculiar Title of Faſting and Mortification, to which we are directed by Religion both natural and reveal-ed, and injoyned by our Church at ſome appointed Times. And certainly it is moſt Juſt that we ſhould thus humble our ſelves, and make our Bodies more obedient to the Dictates of Reaſon, to attend more coolly to our Spiritual Condition, and the Concerns of Eternity.

So that Faſting and Mortification in a ſenſe of our Sins and Dread of God's Diſpleaſure, are very great and excellent Parts of Self-Denial, and Reaſon clear-ly tells us that it is a reaſonable Service to mortifie thoſe Appetites that have been fierce and untractable, and abate that Fulneſs which hath heightned our ir-regular Deſires.

The Church of *Rome* hath indeed framed to itſelf a peculiar kind of Faſting, if it can be called ſo, by abſtaining from particular kinds of Meats at a cer-tain ſeaſon of the Year, and this they injoyn with the greateſt Severity; now whether this Inſtitution were in it's firſt Origine Political or Superſtitious, it is at beſt but a tolerable Folly, and may be as great an In-dulgence to ſome Mens Appetites, as it is wholly in-conſiſtent with others Mens Health, and therefore highly improper for a general Rule; the beſt Method at ſuch a Seaſon is rather to abate our uſual Allow-ance, and obſerve a more regular and limited Tem-perance.

As for thoſe exceſſive Faſtings and Mortifications which ſome Men have ingaged in thro' a miſtaken Notion both of God and of themſelves, they are not to be looked upon as Acts of Self-Denial, but meer Madneſs; as if to enter into Religion, were to abandon humane Nature, and that God could poſſibly be pleaſed with Mens making themſelves wholly uſeleſs to themſelves and the Publick.

Such exceſſive Severities muſt proceed from Madneſs or a horrid ſenſe of Guilt and Deſpair, and accordingly we find that ſome of the Founders of the moſt ſevere religious Orders of the Church of *Rome*, had been guilty of monſtrous Crimes, and ſo have inſtituted a long Succeſſion of innocent deluded Creatures, to afflict themſelves, and expiate Their Guilt: And thus thro' a miſtaken Notion of Religion, Men have become afflictive to themſelves, and uſeleſs to Society, and inſtead of a Rational and proper Self-Denial, have fallen into a Madneſs both Superſtitious and Cruel.

The next Inſtance of a rational Self-Denial ſhould be in relation to our Paſſions, not only in reſtraining them from all criminal Exceſs, for that is the Duty and Office of Virtue, but in keeping them Tame and Submiſſive ever within the Compaſs of Duty, and accuſtoming them to an eaſy habit of Regulation and Reſtraint; this gives us by Degrees Command and Power in our own Breaſt, and the Poſſeſſion of our Mind, which is of all Poſſeſſions

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in the World the moſt valuable. So that we ſhould not ſuffer our Love or Hatred, our Hope or Fear to riſe to any great Degree, but reſtrain the light floatings of Paſſion or Fancy, which are often uneaſy even when they are innocent, and when once ſet in Motion, we know not how ſoon, they may ruffle into Fury, and rage into a Storm: This is not meant that we ſhould, or indeed can carry it to a Stoical Inſenſibility; but certainly to keep our Paſſions cool and moderate, even within the Compaſs of Virtue, is a noble Inſtance of the great Advantage of a rational Self-Denial, and the beſt ſecurity of the quiet and eaſe of Life, which is not only diſturbed by our Vices and Exceſs, but even by our idle Paſſions, and pardonable Follies; our little trifling Reſentments, our partial Friendſhips, our unreaſonable Diſlikes, and unwarrantable Coolneſs; our impatient Forwardneſs at one time, and as unaccountable Indifference at another, which make the Commerce of Life unequal, and hardly worth preſerving. We ſhould reſtrain theſe firſt Motions, and deny our ſelves theſe little Impulſes, which always ariſe from a ſecret ſtruggle in the Heart between Selfiſhneſs and Weakneſs, Pride and Folly. And in this Regulation conſiſts a true greatneſs of Spirit, which ſteadily purſues it's Courſe, and is not diverted by the ſport of Fancy, or Oppoſition of little Difficulties, the Pleaſure of ſhort Amuſements, or the fretting of trifling Diſappointments.

But

But Laſtly, Self-Denial may be conſidered in Relation to the Mind, and this as it regards either the Underſtanding or the Will.

If we conſider the Will, we ſhall find it a ſort of Self-moving Power in the Soul, by which it firſt makes, and afterwards very often delights itſelf in it's own Choice, and for no other Reaſon but becauſe it hath made it; this is often purſued with ſo much Obſtinacy, that nothing can divert it from it's wilful Reſolution, rejecting all Counſel and Advice, overlooking all Difficulty and Inconvenience, and only rejoycing in it's powerful Prepoſſeſſion; now as this muſt often be of fatal Conſequence in the Conduct of Life, ſo we ſhould be very jealous of this Obſtinacy of our own Will, and aware of our ſelves, that our Undertakings are not more recommended by our own Choice, than their Circumſtances or Convenience: And therefore we ſhould often deny our Will, and be jealous of ſuch Power in our Breaſt which often chooſes without any Reaſon, and will ſcarce be brought to liſten to any.

But muſt we go farther yet and deny our Reaſon? If by Reaſon we mean that ſupreme Guide of our Actions, which God hath given for our Direction, and the purſuing it in all it's juſt Deductions, it's natural and neceſſary Conſequences in Order to our great and chief End, we muſt not, we cannot deny it, it is impoſſible we ſhould; for then there could be no Reaſon why we ſhould do any thing at all, and

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the whole Deſign of our Nature would be cut off at once. But if by denying our Reaſon, we mean the underſtanding the true Bounds of our Powers and Faculties, that they are not equal to the Compaſs or Depth of things, and that every thing in Nature cannot be explicitely repreſented in the Mind of Man; this is indeed our Duty and a very rational one, ſo far from being contrary to Reaſon, that it is moſt agreeable to it; to know it's juſt Bounds and Limits, that it's Powers and Capacities are finite, and that we are not equal to the knowledge of things: This is a great and very important part of Self-Denial, for Man would make his Mind the Meaſure of all things, affects to dive into the moſt abſtruſe parts of Nature, and form Concluſions to himſelf upon every Queſtion, and with a fond Inquiry, and endleſs Speculation, intangle himſelf in dangerous Errors and Follies.

Thus we ſee upon what Principles a rational Self-Denial is founded, together with it's Nature, Office, and juſt Limits, and how it may be exerciſed in Relation to our Body, our Paſſions, and our Mind.

But is there nothing more in the Doctrine of Self-Denial? Are there not Expreſſions in the Goſpel of Chriſt, of *hating Father and Mother, Friends and Relations, leaving Houſes and Lands, bearing Infamy and Reproach*, of *taking up the Croſs*, of *hating and laying down even our Life*------ Are theſe to be deduced from rational Principles, are theſe to be reconciled to Reaſon and Nature? Yes--- Theſe are the clear, the neceſſary Conſequences of a rational Self-Denial, the

Glory of this Doctrine when regularly purſued to the Attainment of it's great and chief End: This was the other Point I propoſed to ſpeak to, and ſhew, how the Doctrine of a rational Self-Denial hath been improved, and advanced to the utmoſt Degree of Perfection, by the Chriſtian Religion.

It hath been already obſerved, that the Neceſſity of Self-Denial ariſes from our mixed and compounded Nature, in which there is a great Variety of Tendencies and Inclinations, and ſome of thoſe contrary to, and inconſiſtent with the Attainment of our great and chief End, and therefore are to be reſtrained; which Reſtraint muſt be uneaſy, there being Pleaſure in the Exerciſe, and Uneaſineſs in the oppoſing or diſappointing of any of our natural Faculties or Appetites.

The great and chief End of which we are capable either in this World or the next, is diſcovered and propoſed to us by God in the Chriſtian Religion, with all the Methods by which we may attain it, and whenever the Injoyment of any of the good things of this Life are inconſiſtent with our Duty here, and conſequently our Happineſs hereafter, Reaſon muſt inform us that they are to be given up, and intirely abandoned for our greater and higher Proſpects. Now ſince it may ſo happen in the Courſe and Order of things that we may meet with the greateſt Difficulties in the Purſuit of Virtue and Religion, The Word of God directs us, and Reaſon muſt acknowledge, that all the Injoyments of this Life muſt be reſigned, whenever inconſiſtent with Duty and Virtue.

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So that all the Inſtances of Self-Denial, which ſeem ſo extraordinary, and carried to ſo unnatural a Height in Scripture, are not abſolute, but comparative with reſpect to proper and extraordinary Times and Circumſtances; as occaſional Duties, and not altering the Frame and Temper of our Mind, towards our Neighbour or ourſelf, or deſtructive of Benevolence, Filial Piety, or Natural Affection; we muſt love our Father and Mother, Friends and Relations, may keep our Poſſeſſions, cultivate our good Eſteem, and cheriſh our Life; Nature, and Reaſon, and Religion ſecure theſe to us in the common and ordinary Courſe: But tho' Nature moſt ſurely inſtructs us that theſe are to be loved, yet Reaſon as clearly tells us that they all are to be abandoned, rather than forfeit our Innocence and Virtue: And Religion only carries this Matter ſtill farther and teaches us, that they are chearfully to be reſigned whenever they hinder us in following our Duty and our God; and this is the cleareſt Dictate of natural Reaſon, that the leſſer is to be given up to the greater Good.

And this our bleſſed Saviour himſelf explains, for tho' in ſome Places, after the Manner of Oriental Expreſſion, the Form is abſolute, of *hating Father and Mother, Friends and Relations*, of *forſaking all that he hath*, yet we ſee how theſe are to be underſtood by Parallel Scriptures; *he that loveth Father and Mother more than me, is not worthy of me, and he that loveth Wife and Children more than me, is not worthy of me:* And then it follows, *there is no Man that hath left Houſe or Parents, or Brethren, or Wife or Children for the King-*

Kingdom of God's ſake, who ſhall not receive manifold more in this preſent time, and in the World to come Life everlaſting: Here we find both the Reaſon and Reward of ſuch Self-Denial, and there was great Occaſion for ſuch Precepts in the Infancy of Chriſtianity, and may be frequent Uſe of them in all ſucceeding Ages; for how great is the Influence of Friends in the changing of Religion, how often do they reſtrain Men from embracing the True, how often do they encourage them to follow a falſe Perſwaſion: It was neceſſary that our bleſſed Saviour ſhould thus guard Men againſt the fatal Bent and Prepoſſeſſion of Family or National Belief, which is the moſt powerful Hindrance of converting Mankind.

Another Inſtance of Self-Denial that we meet with in Scripture is the *taking up the Croſs*, by which Expreſſion is meant, a Readineſs to undergo all Difficulties, and Uneaſineſs, and Damage, and Loſs, for the ſake of Chriſt and his Profeſſion; and is not to be underſtood abſolutely, of abſurd and unneceſſary afflicting our ſelves to a degree of Madneſs and Enthuſiaſm, without Reſpect to time or Occaſion; but a general Senſe and Perſwaſion of the Mind, that we ſhall meet with many Difficulties in our *Chriſtian Warfare*, and as general a Reſolution and Steadineſs of Spirit to undergo them all when Occaſion ſhall offer.

Now as nothing can be more reaſonable than that we ſhould thus reſolve to follow our Duty and our God, thro' all Difficulty and Oppoſition; So how neceſſary was ſuch a Precept at the firſt planting of Chriſtianity, when the Powers of the World were ſet againſt

againſt it, and Oppoſition and Perſecution threatned it on every Side: Nay how neceſſary even now, for all States and Conditions of Men, who would lead a Godly and a Chriſtian Life; for 'tis an eternal Truth, *that all that are in Chriſt muſt ſuffer Perſecution*, from their own unruly Appetites and Paſſions, from a ſinful and deceitful World; from the Scorn and Inſults of triumphant Vice, the Invaſions of oppreſſive Might, the Malice of groundleſs Calumny, and mighty Influence of *Spiritual* and Temporal *Wickedneſs in High-Places.*

But the laſt and higheſt Inſtance that could poſſibly be given, is the *parting with Reputation* and *the laying down of Life*; theſe I have joyned together, they cannot be ſeparated, nor know I which to prefer; if Nature powerfully incline us to cheriſh our Life, Reaſon as ſtrongly tells us that without Reputation Life is not worth preſerving; yet both muſt be abſolutely and chearfully reſigned, when Religion calls us to the Exerciſe of theſe ſevere Duties.

For this is the juſt and neceſſary Conſequence of a rational Self-Denial, inlightned by Revelation and inlivened by the promiſe of a glorious Reward, infinite and eternal, far above all the Injoyments of this Life, and even Life itſelf: This is the laſt Period of the glorious Conflict that humane Nature muſt undergo for the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion: The general Tendency of a Chriſtian Courſe hath indeed the Promiſe of temporal Bleſſings, ſecures our Reputation, and prolongs our Life, and makes both the one and the other more ſafe and comfortable; but Occaſions may offer and Difficulties ſometimes ariſe, when they cannot be

preſerved, when Reputation may be dangerous, and Life a Snare.

For Wickedneſs may ſo prevail as to confound the notions of Merit and Applauſe, and give to Villany the Stamp of Fame, and then we muſt be content to be evil ſpoken of, and count it our Glory and our Joy when we ſuffer Reproach, for the Name of Chriſt and the Cauſe of Virtue; for a *Wo* may be their Lot, whom *all Men ſpeak well of*, and they may be bleſſed of whom *all manner of Evil is ſpoken*; ſo great may be the Wickedneſs of Times, ſo high the Violence and Rage of Parties; for how much Obloquy and Reproach may the moſt worthy Man undergo, in a degenerate Age, from the contrary Side.

And if we muſt part with Reputation, and ſuffer Reproach for the Name of Chriſt, and thus deny one of the ſtrongeſt Tendencies of Nature for the Cauſe of Duty and Virtue, it will not perhaps be ſo difficult as we imagine, even to lay down our Lives for his ſake. Difficulties and Perſecutions may, and ſometimes muſt ariſe, and then it would be our Duty, a neceſſary Duty to reſiſt even unto Blood. We ſee in a late Inſtance, that the Proteſtant Religion is not fully ſecured againſt the bloody Attempts of Popery, by a long Poſſeſſion of Rights and Priviledges, under the Sanction of the moſt ſolemn Treaties, and the ſeeming Calm that *Europe* injoys. The Spirit of that Religion is always reſtleſs and active, and ſteadily purſuing the ſame Scheme, whilſt Proteſtants are ſhamefully and ſtupidly negligent, or miſerably divided amongſt themſelves; ſo that Danger and Perſecution may ſtill be our Lot,

and

and we know not how ſoon Providence may call us to ſeal our Faith with our Blood. It is no doubt very ſhocking to humane Nature to be carried to the Stake, but do we conſider how ſhocking and dreadful it would be to return from it, having deſerted our Duty, abandoned our Profeſſion, denied our Saviour and our God; Conſcience would then prove ſtronger and more dreadful than our Fears, and terribly revenge itſelf upon the Weakneſs of Nature that had ſo meanly betray'd it, and kindle a Fire in the guilty Apoſtate Breaſt, hotter than the Flames it had baſely eſcaped in this World, and hardly to be exceeded by thoſe that are prepared for it in the next. Had the Magiſtrate of *Thorn* who ſo glorioufly ſuffered for the Proteſtant Cauſe, and laid down his Life rather than abandon his Profeſſion; had the Magiſtrate of *Thorn* renounced his Religion, and baſely bought the poor Remains of Life at the Expence of his Conſcience, where would he have hid his devoted Head? devoted to Infamy in this World and Vengeance in the next: A Wretch thus abandoned by his Conſcience and his God, would wholly be delivered over to his tormenting Guilt, and we cannot form a Notion how dreadful we may be to ourſelves, when the Mind is diſtracted with Stings of Conſcience, and given over to Deſpair; he then would find what a Change he had made, and fully perceive the fatal Truth of that Queſtion, with which our Bleſſed Saviour inforces and concludes this argument; *for what would it profit a Man if he ſhould gain the whole world and loſe his own Soul, or what ſhall a Man give in exchange for his Soul*;

which

which is the moſt important Queſtion that ever was asked, contains the nobleſt Sentiment of true Philoſophy and Religion that ever was delivered to the World, and comprehends the whole Force and Purport of all that can poſſibly be ſaid, or imagined, in this Point.

And thus I have endeavoured to lay down and eſtabliſh the whole doctrine of a rational and Chriſtian Self-Denial, drawn from Principles of Reaſon and Nature, and applied to all the Purpoſes of Scripture and Revelation: By which we may ſee how our Duty is founded in our nature, and the nature of things; that God hath injoyned us nothing but what is moſt agreeable to, and perfective of, all the Faculties of our Bodies and our Minds, productive of our great End, and chief Good: I have alſo laid down it's juſt Limits, and ſhewed where it may exceed, and ſtart out into trifling Severities, Madneſs and Enthuſiaſm, which can never be a Service acceptable to God, where it is not uſeful to Men, and perfective of their Nature.

On theſe foundations, Self-Denial muſt appear a rational, uniform, coherent Scheme, purſuing our true Intereſt, and never deviating from our chief End and Deſign, or drawn off by any inferior Intereſt or Temptation; and now the only Objection that can be brought againſt it, is, that it is all Self-Love, a refined, ſubtle, rational Selfiſhneſs; and it is true it is ſo, nor can we, or ought we to be wrought on by any other Motives. The more noble any Being is, the more ſtrongly and unvariably it moves towards it's own End and Perfection, and therefore the ſupreme

Being

Being is as it were eternally imployed in the Purſuit and Poſſeſſion of Self-Perfection and Complacence; and we cannot imagine any thing in his Works or Deſigns but what moſt ſurely contributes to the eternal Glory of his Nature: So that Self-Love is the very height of Excellence in ſo perfect a Being, and the neceſſary Reſult of Power, and Wiſdom, and Goodneſs infinite.

And 'tis only from the Imperfection of our Nature, that we do not always act agreeably to our true Intereſt; we are mixed and compounded Beings, have a Variety of Tendencies and Inclinations which are uſeful in a certain Degree, for the Attainment of the Ends of Providence in this Life, but when indulged too far, are wholly inconſiſtent with our Duty or Happineſs in the next. Now the more wiſe and perfect any Being is, the more cloſely and ſteadily it purſues it's true Intereſt, for the Attainment of Perfection, and the End of its Nature; and all Difficulty and Uneaſineſs muſt ariſe, from the Mixture and contrary Tendencies of its Inclinations, which is the condition of this Life, the neceſſary Reſult of our imperfect compounded Being, the Struggle here below: For when we attain Perfection in a future State, this Struggle will ceaſe, and the whole Tendency of our Nature will be towards our true Happineſs and ſupreme Good; we ſhall no more be diſtracted or divided in our Purſuits; where nothing is unequal, criminal, or irregular, there can be no Self-Denial: The Soul will move ſteadily on without Variation or Reſtraint, in the Purſuit of Self-Complacence, and endleſs Perfection.

But while we continue here below, we muſt ſuffer the Difficulties, and guard againſt the Inconveniencies of our preſent State, that is, we muſt *deny our ſelves*, and not forfeit the whole of our Happineſs, for the Gratification of any weak inferior Inclination.

Convinc'd thus by Reaſon and the Word of God, let us heartily ſet about the Practice of this moſt rational and Chriſtian Duty, and offer unto God this moſt reaſonable Service, of following his Will, our own true Intereſt, and the Deſign of our Nature, thro' the whole Courſe of our Conduct, rather than gratifie every weak and trifling Inclination, deſtructive of our beſt and nobleſt Purpoſes. Let us keep the juſt Mean between a criminal Indulgence of Appetite and Paſſion, and an abſurd Denial of Natural and innocent Deſires; between unbridled Licence, and exceſſive Severity, the one of which is wholly contrary to Religion, the other can never be reconciled to Reaſon; and let us be truly ſenſible of the Situation we are in, in this Life, that we are made up of Tendencies and Paſſions that are inconſiſtent with and deſtructive of each other, and that nothing but Reaſon and Religion can ſo regulate them, as to make us tolerably eaſy here, or happy for ever hereafter.

Now in this and all other Inquiries concerning the knowledge of our Duty and the Divine Will, the Truth of Religion, and Perfection of our Nature, To God only be the Glory, the Power, and the Praiſe now, *&c.*

F I N I S.